

To Be a King or Queen

Suppose one of our Sunday readers – a woman – were to approach the lectern, open the lectionary and read the following biblical passage:

Wisdom is radiant and unfading. Within her is a spirit intelligent, holy, unique, lucid, benevolent, irresistible, dependable. She is the breath of God's power, a reflection of eternal light, the image of his goodness. She is more splendid than the sun and outshines the constellations.

And now suppose she closes the lectionary, pauses and announces: *This passage I have just read is all about me.* Well, I'm sure you would be able to hear a pin drop as each of us in the congregation would look around, our eyes asking the question: *Has this lector lost her marbles?*

Or suppose another reader – named Charlie - were to approach the lectern and read from the Book of Isaiah:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of vision to the blind.

And suppose again, upon closing the book, Charlie calmly declared: *This reading is about me and my destiny.* We'd probably react the way the people of Nazareth reacted to Jesus long ago, when he did the same thing. *Who does he think he is? Isn't that the same Charlie who dishes out the spaghetti sauce at Men's Club dinners? So now he thinks he's Christ Almighty? Next he'll think he's Napoleon and that's the end of Charlie."*

But why would we react in that way? A person suddenly declares she is a reflection of her Creator's own face and beauty; a person declares he has been called to play a Christic role in this world's redemption - and we assume they're suffering illusions of grandeur. Why? Perhaps it's because we live in an age that assumes the best we can hope for is temporary physical comfort in a world that can turn lethal, that we are vulnerable, even that we don't count for much among so many millions.

And so we learn to keep our heads down, to become a face in the crowd, to avoid doing anything morally extraordinary. We learn to value anonymity, privacy, limited liability –to be a shadow instead of the complex and potentially extraordinary child of God we are.

Which makes me grateful to be an heir of our Church, which despite its failings, remains one of the enduring institutions in this world that insists we are each "somebody" in the sense Marlon Brando said the word in that great film *On the Waterfront* – "I coulda been somebody!" Emily Dickenson said something about this in her poem:

We never know how high we are / Till we are asked to rise / And then if we are true to plan / Our statures touch the skies - // The Heroism we recite / Would be a normal thing / Did not ourselves the Cubits warp / For fear to be a King. [or Queen!]

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